

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 2-4 and 11 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the recited subject matter.

Please AMEND claims 1, 10, 12, and 13, and ADD new claim 14, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all claims currently presented are reproduced below.

1. (Currently Amended) A near-field light generating method for ~~forming a fine irradiating light spot at a portion adjacent to~~ from a light source to a metal film that has a fine opening having a size of not more than a wavelength of the light emitted from the light source, and forming a fine light spot adjacent to the fine opening on a light outgoing side of the fine opening by irradiating the fine opening with the light, said method comprising:

~~forming a light spot having a length and a width which are substantially equal to each other by the fine opening, the fine opening having~~ providing the metal film with a rectangular shape fine opening whose length to width ratio is between 1.1 times and 2 times that of a standard square opening, obtained by increasing one side of the standard square opening;
and

irradiating the metal film with light from the light source to form the fine light spot, which has having a length and a width which that are different from each other substantially equal to those of the standard square opening.

2-4. (Canceled)

5. (Withdrawn) A near-field exposure mask, comprising:

a mask base material;

a light blocking layer disposed on the mask base material, and

a fine opening having a size of not more than a wavelength of light used for exposure,

wherein the fine opening comprises a rectangular opening having a length and a width which are different from each other, the rectangular opening having a length/width ratio which permits transfer of a pattern having a length and a width which are substantially equal to each other.

6. (Withdrawn) A mask according to Claim 5, wherein the fine opening has a length/width ratio of 1.1. - 2.

7. (Withdrawn) A mask according to Claim 5, wherein the fine opening is provided in a plurality of fine openings including the rectangular opening and a slit-like opening.

8. (Withdrawn) A near-field exposure method, comprising:

providing a near-field exposure mask according to Claim 5, and

exposure an exposure object to light by using the near-field exposure mask.

9. (Withdrawn) A near-field exposure apparatus for exposing an exposure object to light, comprising:

a near-field exposure mask according to Claim 5, and
a light source to be exposed to light.

10. (Currently Amended) A near-field optical head[[,]] comprising:

~~means for generating near field light, provided with a rectangular~~ a light blocking
film comprised of a metal film; and

a rectangular fine opening having a formed in the metal film, the rectangular fine
opening having size of not more than a wavelength of light or a combination of the rectangular
fine opening and a slit like opening emitted from a light source, the light from the light source
irradiating the metal film to form a fine light spot,

~~wherein a light spot having a length and a width which are substantially equal to~~
~~each other by the~~ a length to width ratio of the rectangular fine opening is between 1.1 times and
2 times that of a standard square opening, is formed at a portion adjacent to an obtained by
increasing one side of the standard square opening, and the fine light spot has a length and width
that are substantially equal to those of the standard square portion on a light outgoing side of the
rectangular fine opening.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) A near-field optical microscope for effecting surface
observation of a sample, said microscope comprising:

a near-field optical head according to ~~Claim~~ claim 10.

13. (Currently Amended) A recording and reproducing apparatus for effecting recording and reproduction with respect to a recording medium, said apparatus comprising:

a near-field optical head according to ~~Claim~~ claim 10.

14. (New) A near-field light generating method according to claim 1, wherein the length to width ratio is between 1.5 times and 2 times that of the standard square opening.